

Easter 4

Year B 2021

1 John 3:16-24

John 10:11-18

Come Holy Spirit, give life to my words.

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer and giver of life.

Amen.

We hear today, in our epistle, from the first letter of John.

Now there are a lot of “Johns” in Scripture
so let us be sure we have an understanding of this particular John.

This is not John the Baptizer of Jesus.

This is not the apostle John, brother of James,
son of the fisherman Zebedee.

The same apostles, John and James,
who desired to sit at Jesus’ right and left.

Scholars believe that the author of
the First Letter of John is the work of one single teacher,
writing in the Johannine tradition.

It is believed, the author belonged to a school of such teachers.

Teachers of the Evangelist John,
not John the Baptist,
and not John the apostle, son of Zebedee.

Not sure that actually cleared up any confusion but here we go.

What we hear in this letter is that there is trouble.

There is trouble in this community.

It is believed that the letter was authored around 90-100 CE.

The letter addresses some of the struggles
the community is facing with the reality
of trying to live into Christian ideals
nearly two centuries after the death of Christ.

The difficulties not only arise from non-Christian society
but also within the various Christian communities
vying to be the true form of Christianity.

The author of today's letter is trying to unify
the community to whom the letter is addressed.

To focus and define the beliefs and standards
that are the cause of discord and dissolution.

The portion we hear today is focused on the new covenant commandment.

The primary mandate that God is just.

This mandate is made known in the new commandment:

Love one another.

By this, loving one another,
we know that Jesus laid down his life for the world.

The community ought to lay down their lives as well.

God's justice demands that anyone who has means
and sees another without what they need to know the love of God,
they must give.

They must help.

We must help.

To live into the new commandment given to us,
we must help where we see need in the world.

It is by helping,
by laying aside our excessive needs,
that that the world will know believing in Jesus Christ means justice.

Love of God, love of Jesus,
claiming Christianity as our guide,
we must love, not just this community,
but our neighbors as well.

We must love, not in word or speech,
but in truth and action.

Love without action is not truly the love of the new commandment.

In the words of one commentator:

First John 3:24 completes the chapter by positing that learning obedience to the fullness of both Christ-believing and people-loving is what it means to abide in Jesus.

We, individually,
and as the people of St. Andrew's,
have been given much.

Having said that,
I don't mean to diminish any hardships we've experienced.

But the reality is,
we live in a country where much is available to us
compared to many places in the world.

Clearly, we know there is room for much improvement
in many areas of our society
such as income, medical and housing equality,
legal justice,
race and gender equality, and much more.

The question I have, for myself,
as well as each of us individually, is:

Am I truly living out my life
as a believer of Jesus Christ, in truth and action?

Can I look back over my life to date and see evidence of such?

Am I able to recognize in my future plans
evidence of how I might love in truth and action?

What might that look like?

How might I accomplish that in the remainder of my life?

We here at St. Andrew's have been gifted with much as well.

We have temporary ownership,
if you will, of this beautiful campus and surrounding property.

My question for us as the community of St. Andrew's is:

Are we truly living out our communal life
as believers of Jesus Christ, in truth and action?

Can we imagine future plans that evidence
how we might love in truth and action?

What might this look like?

Are we able to come together
to bring such plans to life in this neighborhood?

Plans which show forth our understanding that love is action?

Concrete action where love of Christ is evidenced in justice?

Actions which love of Christ requires us
to give our lives in pursuit of truth and action?

I leave you with the words of commentator Brian Peterson:

*“..... to give one’s life in this way,
in imitation of Jesus’ own love,
is more than simply a result of believing;
it is the concrete shape that belief takes in the world,
and the presence of such giving
is a sign that God’s love is present and active.”*